

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 19866 070953Z
ACTION DHA-05

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 19866

FOLLOWING TEL SENT BANGKOK FROM CHIANG MAI 7 SEPT REPEATED FYI:

QTE
C O N F I D E N T I A L CHIANG MAI 334

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, TH, LA
SUBJECT: THAI EFFORTS TO DISCOURAGE LAO REFUGEES IN UTTARADIT
PROVINCE

1. SUMMARY. DURING A RECENT VISIT TO UTTARADIT PROVINCE WE WERE TOLD BY SEVERAL THAI OFFICIALS THAT FOR A NUMBER OF MONTHS NOW ALL NEW REFUGEES TRYING TO CROSS INTO THE PROVINCE WERE BEING STOPPED AT THE BORDER AND TOLD TO RETURN TO LAOS. THE THAI GOVERNMENT IS SPREAD EXTREMELY THIN ALONG THE BORDER AT THIS PARTICULAR POINT AND WE SUSPECT THAT WHAT IN FACT IS HAPPENING IS THAT THE REFUGEES ARE NOT BEING PERMITTED TO TAKE UP RESIDENCE IN THE LOCAL REFUGEE CAMP, BUT THAT SOME ARE SEEKING SHELTER WITH RELATIVES AND FRIENDS LIVING ON THE THAI SIDE.

END SUMMARY.

2. DURING A RECENT VISIT TO A REFUGEE CAMP IN FAK THA DISTRICT IN UTTARADIT PROVINCE, WE WERE TOLD BY WORKING-LEVEL THAI OFFICIALS THAT FOR THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS ALL NEW REFUGEE-
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GEES CROSSING THE BORDER IN THAT AREA WERE BEING REFUSED ENTRY AND WERE BEING SENT BACK TO LAOS. MOST SUCH REFUGEES ARE HILL TRIBES, MOSTLY MEO, BUT THERE MAY ALSO BE SOME ETHNIC LAO.

3. THE CAMP AT FAK THA IS IN AN EXTREMELY REMOTE AREA IN THE NORTH. THAI OFFICIALS ARE SPREAD VERY THIN AND THE DISTRICT OFFICIALS THERE COMPLAIN OF THEIR INABILITY

TO EXERT ANY REAL CONTROL OVER THE BORDER. WE THEREFORE SUSPECT THAT WHAT THIS POLICY OF "NONADMISSION" REALLY MEANS IS THAT NEW REFUGEES ARE NOT BEING PERMITTED TO TAKE UP RESIDENCE IN THE REFUGEE CAMP IN THE AREA OR TO DRAW UN SUPPLIED RICE. IN FACT, THE REFUGEE CAMP HAS STABILIZED AND ITS SIZE IS STILL THE SAME AS IT WAS ONE YEAR AGO.

4. THE BORDER IN THIS AREA IS ALMOST COMPLETELY UNMARKED AND FOR YEARS RESIDENTS OF THE AREA HAVE MOVED BACK AND FORTH WITH EASE, MEETING AND OFTEN INTERMARRYING WITH PEOPLE ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE LINE. POPULATION IS SPARSELY SETTLED AND MAINLY CONSISTS OF HILLTRIBERS. WHAT IS PROBABLY HAPPENING IS THAT SOME WHO OPT TO LEAVE LAOS ARE MOVING IN WITH FRIENDS AND RELATIVES ON THIS SIDE OF THE BORDER, OR PERHAPS ARE EVEN MAKING NEW HILLTRIBE SETTLEMENTS WITHIN THAILAND BUT OUT OF REACH OF NORMAL THAI GOVERNMENT CONTACTS.

5. NONE OF THE OFFICIALS WITH WHOM WE TALKED APPEARED TO BE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THIS PROBLEM. THEIR GENERAL REACTION WAS THAT AS LONG AS THE UNHCR SUPPORT TO THE REFUGEE CAMP WAS LIMITED THERE WAS NO WAY IN WHICH THE CAMP COULD HANDLE ANY ADDITIONAL REFUGEES. THE ANSWER THEN WAS TO SIMPLY NOT ALLOW ANY ADDITIONAL REFUGEES IN.

6. COMMENT: WHILE SOME POTENTIAL REFUGEES MAY IN FACT
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HAVE BEEN SENT BACK ACROSS THE BORDER IN THIS AREA, GIVEN THE SPARSE SETTLEMENT PATTERN AND THE LACK OF ANY EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT CONTROL ON EITHER SIDE OF THE LINE, WE SUSPECT THAT SUCH ACTION HAS NOT RESULTED IN MUCH IF ANY LAO GOVERNMENT RETALIATION AGAINST HILLTRIBERS UNSUCCESSFULLY ATTEMPTING TO FLEE LAOS.

TANNER UNQTE
O'DONOHUE

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